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Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report is submitted in compliance with General Assembly resolution 56/135 of 19 December 2001 on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa.

It updates the information contained in the report of the Secretary-General submitted to the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly in September 2001 (A/56/335).

The report contains an overview of recent developments and activities, more detailed updates by subregion, namely, East Africa and the Horn of Africa, West and Central Africa, the Great Lakes region and southern Africa, information about inter-agency cooperation on thematic issues and an overview of cooperation with regional organizations in Africa. It concludes with some observations on the importance of a multidimensional approach in the governance of refugee problems in Africa.

* A/57/150.

** A special effort was made to obtain information that is as up to date as possible from our field offices and our partners, which could not respond immediately owing to competing priorities.

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I. Introduction

1. Since the last report of the Secretary-General on this topic (A/56/335), the main African refugee groups continue to originate from Burundi (553,900), the Sudan (489,560), Angola (470,500), Somalia (440,200), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (391,650) and Eritrea (333,100), followed by Liberia (244,500) and Sierra Leone (178,900) as of the end of 2001. Mass repatriation operations carried out during this reporting period, however, reduced the total figure of the refugee population in Africa. The return to their homes of some 92,300 Sierra Leoneans, 50,200 Somalis and over 32,700 Eritreans resulted in a decrease of the total refugee figure from the previous 3.6 million, as of the end of 2000, to 3.3 million refugees in Africa, or 27 per cent of the global 12 million refugee population. While prospects for peace rose as two prolonged civil wars, in Angola and in Sierra Leone, came to an end, intensified fighting and precarious security situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Liberia constituted major setbacks to the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to repatriate refugees in safety and dignity. New waves of refugees crossed into neighbouring countries. Others were displaced within their borders.

2. Given this complex operational background, UNHCR adopted a "clustered" or "situational" approach in Africa, which further strengthened regional cooperation. In order to strengthen its role in refugee protection, conflict prevention and management, and linking humanitarian assistance to development, UNHCR concluded a memorandum of understanding with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in November 2001, thus formalizing cooperation agreements with all major regional and subregional organizations in Africa. In addition, UNHCR reinvigorated its bilateral cooperation with the African Development Bank to promote conditions for durable solutions for displaced persons, namely in post-conflict recovery, local integration and reintegration.

3. While voluntary repatriation operations continued in Eritrea, Sierra Leone and Somalia, rehabilitation and reconstruction of the areas of return often progressed very slowly. To sustain the reintegration of returnees and to lower possible tension among the returnees and the local population, necessary infrastructure needs to be in place and the capacity of the receiving communities strengthened. As reintegration processes do not feature prominently in the national recovery and reconstruction programmes owing to policy gaps, discussions on methods and measures to finance repatriation and reintegration operations specifically for Eritrea, Sierra Leone and Somalia were pursued with development agencies and donors. Within the framework of inter-agency working groups, UNHCR has also collaborated with various partners in promoting peace and development in Africa. In an effort to build a smooth transition from emergency assistance to sustainable development, UNHCR has committed itself to support Africa-led and multilateral initiatives, such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the Tokyo International Conference on African Development.

II. Regional overviews

4. The regional overviews below have been compiled by UNHCR with contributions from other agencies, notably the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

A. East Africa and the Horn of Africa

5. As of the end of 2001, the subregion was host to nearly 1 million refugees, mainly from Eritrea, Somalia and the Sudan. During the reporting period, the region witnessed positive developments: the ongoing voluntary repatriation of Eritrean refugees from the Sudan and of Somali refugees from Ethiopia; the acceptance by both Eritrea and Ethiopia of the border delimitation decision of the Boundary Commission in The Hague as a component of the Peace Agreement signed in Algiers in December 2000; the closure of three Somali refugee camps in Ethiopia; and the completion of the repatriation of the Djiboutian refugees of Afar ethnic origin from Ethiopia. The application of the cessation clause for the Eritrean refugees was announced in May 2002, one year after the repatriation of Eritrean refugees in the Sudan

started on 12 May 2001. Reconciliation efforts between Djibouti and Somalia will contribute to the further repatriation of the Somali refugees to north-western Somalia. However, clan fighting in the central and southern parts of Somalia make it difficult for some Somalis to return to their areas of origin. The Sudan continued to produce the largest number of refugees in the region, hosted mainly in western Ethiopia and Uganda. Self-reliance and self-sufficiency programmes are ongoing for these refugees to enable them to become productive agents of development and to contribute to the development of their host community.

Repatriation to Eritrea

6. On 8 May 2002, UNHCR announced that the "ceased circumstances" clauses were invoked for Eritrean refugees. The worldwide application of the cessation clause will take effect on 31 December 2002. UNHCR considers that the end of the war of independence in June 1991 and the end of the border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia in June 2000 have effectively removed the root causes of the Eritrean refugee problem. In accordance with the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, those refugees who refuse to reavail themselves of the protection of Eritrea, claiming a continuing fear of persecution, will have their case reviewed to confirm the well-foundedness of their claim. Those found to be in continued need of international protection will remain in their host countries as refugees. The cessation clauses do not apply to refugees who fled Eritrea for reasons other than the war of independence or the border conflict with Ethiopia. To facilitate repatriation, extensive information campaigns are being run in the Sudan and refugees are encouraged to undertake "go and see" visits to their areas of origin. Some 13,140 Eritrean refugees have repatriated from the Sudan as of the end of May 2002, bringing the total number of those who have returned to some 45,880 since the repatriation operations began in May 2001. Registration for the voluntary repatriation of all camp and settlement-based refugees in the Sudan is expected to finish by the end of 2002 and the repatriation movement is expected to be completed by 2003.

Repatriation to Somalia and reintegration activities

7. During 2002, more than 11,300 Somali refugees repatriated mainly from Ethiopia to north-western Somalia, adding to the 50,000 who had repatriated in 2001. Thirty-five thousand Somali refugees are expected to return by the end of 2002, enabling the closure of Rabasso and Camaboker Somali refugee camps in eastern Ethiopia by the end of July and September 2002, respectively. This will halve the current number of 67,000 Somali refugees in Ethiopia and allow for the consolidation of the remaining refugees into three camps with continued assistance to those who are mostly from the volatile security areas of southern Somalia. Prior to the mass repatriation operations, speedy rehabilitation of the repatriation route is considered essential and in the areas of return, water needs and the rehabilitation of schools are among the priority reintegration projects. Unexploded ordnance and mines planted along the borders and the military zone are also hampering reintegration activities.

8. The reopening of the border between Djibouti and north-western Somalia in early November 2001 allowed preparations to begin for the repatriation of the estimated total of 21,700 Somali refugees in Djibouti. Representatives of the World Food Programme, the Somali Ministry of Resettlement, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, the Office national d'assistance aux réfugiés et sinistrés de Djibouti and UNHCR offices in Hargeisa and Djibouti undertook a joint cross-border assessment mission to the Awdal region, north-western Somalia, in April 2002 to determine the absorption capacity in the areas of return. Mine clearance activities in the expected area of return are progressing, while a demining assessment mission was conducted in the western Adwal region as well.

Kenya

9. Renewed fighting in early May 2002 in south-western Somalia forced some 10,000 Somali refugees to cross into the Mandera area in north-eastern Kenya. These refugees were subsequentiy transferred to the Dadaab camp, where protection and assistance needs will be more adequately provided. Emergency assistance was also required at the Kakuma camp, north-western Kenya, severely affected by torrential rains and high winds in early November 2001, and where more than a quarter of the camp residents

(nearly 23,000) — primarily Sudanese — were rendered homeless in a very short period of time.

10. The investigation by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services into corruption associated with resettlement activities in the UNHCR Nairobi office was concluded during the reporting period. Based on its findings, remedial measures have included deployment of additional staff to the Nairobi office, while changing the entire staff component dealing with protection and resettlement issues; creation of a transparency committee composed of UNHCR protection staff, representatives from resettlement countries, NGOs and civil society; and separation of eligibility interviews for resettlement from the refugee status determination process. In 2001, 9,045 refugees from Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan were assisted in resettling in third countries from Kenya.

B. West and Central Africa

11. As of the end of 2001, there were 888,390 persons of concern to UNHCR in the West and Central Africa region. The Mano River Basin region continued to be of concern to the Office, with complex movements of refugees and returnees, mixed populations of combatants and genuine refugees and increased numbers of internally displaced persons. During the reporting period, relocation operations continued to transfer Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea farther inland away from border areas, while facilitated voluntary repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees was ongoing. The recurrence of intense fighting in Liberia destabilized the subregion, as it forced Liberians again to flee their country. Some 62,000 Liberian refugees have crossed into Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Sierra Leone since the beginning of 2002. In other areas, the repatriation of Chadian refugees was completed and negotiations are under way for the repatriation of the Central African Republic refugees who fled the coup attempt in Bangui in May 2001.

Guinea

12. Guinea continues to be the largest refugee-hosting country in the subregion with 178,440 persons mainly from Liberia and Sierra Leone as of the end of 2001. While Sierra Leonean refugees remained cautious in the first half of 2002 and adopted a "wait and see" approach, the election in May 2002 and the desire for family reunification led to the decision of many refugees to repatriate. UNHCR was able to increase the pace of return when repatriation to Sierra Leone by road began on 23 March 2002. Forty thousand Sierra Leonean refugees had returned during 2001 under UNHCR auspices. However, the deteriorating security situation in Liberia has led to the arrival of 17,300 new Liberian arrivals in 2002 alone, with an estimated 3,500 Liberian refugees crossing into Guinea on one single day in May 2002. As Liberian refugees were relocated from border areas at the request of the Government of Guinea, the two refugee camps in the Nzerekore region reached full capacity. UNHCR is conducting negotiations with the Government for a new site.

Sierra Leone

13. The complex situation in Sierra Leone has posed a continuous challenge in carrying out humanitarian activities. UNHCR continued to assist the Sierra Leonean returnees as well as new arrivals of Liberian refugees and to relocate the latter farther inland from border areas. Most chiefdoms in Sierra Leone, except for a handful in the eastern Kailahun District, have been declared safe for return by the National Resettlement Committee since the declaration of the end of the civil war and the completion of the demobilization. The cumulative number of refugees who were assisted in returning from Guinea stood at some 16,031 persons by mid-2002. An additional 18,287 persons returned from Liberia since UNHCR first began facilitating this leg of the repatriation on 13 February 2002. The figures for voluntary repatriation, however, started to decline owing to the "wait and see" approach by some Sierra Leonean refugees, the rainy season and the agricultural cycle. Meanwhile, in May 2002, a number of Sierra Leonean refugees began returning from Guinea-Bissau, where some 4,000 Sierra Leonean refugees are hosted. The post-electoral period in Sierra Leone will focus on peace-building and developmental activities, as preparations for reintegration activities are under way.

14. Meanwhile, intensified fighting in Liberia continued to displace Liberians within the country and into Sierra Leone, especially into the Kailahun District. UNHCR emergency teams arrived in Sierra Leone on 25 February 2002 to lend support to the operation on the ground and to handle the mixed movement of returnees and refugees. Liberian refugees have been

relocated to five different sites farther inland within Sierra Leone since fighting in Liberia worsened earlier in 2002. Contingency planning for the influx of Liberian refugees is being regularly reviewed and the extension of existing sites and the creation of new ones will be considered if the influx continues.

Liberia

15. As fighting worsened in the area, in May 2002, access was cut off to the two Sierra Leonean refugee camps near the border in Sinje, Liberia, 80 km north-west of Monrovia. Radio communication was maintained. However, delivery of humanitarian aid was temporarily halted for more than two weeks and the pace of aid delivery to other camps closer to Monrovia slowed significantly. The rebel attack on the Sierra Leonean refugee camp in Sinje on 20 June 2002 resulted in thousands of Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees fleeing across the border. The estimated 15,000 to 20,000 internally displaced persons living within the refugee camps in Liberia added to the complexity of caring for refugees and asylum-seekers. Thus far, UNHCR has been providing only limited assistance to displaced persons, primarily in the sectors of shelter and non-food items.

The Gambia

16. The resurgence of fighting in Casamance, Senegal, in early May 2002 caused 2,000 persons to flee to southern Gambia. To assess the humanitarian needs, humanitarian agencies sent emergency missions to the border area situated some 30 km north of the capital, Banjul. Arrangements have been made to transfer refugees to the Bambila refugee camp, some 200 km farther inland. Some refugees expressed reluctance to be relocated.

C. Great Lakes region

17. The Great Lakes region remains one of the most volatile areas in Africa, with more than 1.2 million refugees, mainly from Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and the Sudan. The United Republic of Tanzania continued to be the largest refugee-hosting country with 668,107 refugees by the end of 2001, of whom 498,082 were assisted by UNHCR. The war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to displace persons within and across the borders, while the Bas-Congo Province received a sudden influx of nearly 10,000 Angolan refugees in August 2001, bringing the total number of Angolan refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to 186,879 by the end of 2001. Heavy fighting in Kisangani in the Democratic Republic of the Congo further exacerbated the already fragile security situation in the subregion.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

18. The separation of former Central African Republic combatants from the refugee community in Zongo in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was successfully completed during this reporting period. UNHCR, together with the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) began the operations on 15 October 2001, transferring former combatants to the Bokilio settlement, some 120 km away from Zongo. After a period of observation, the former combatants will be interviewed for individual refugee status determination. Soon after the separation operation, UNHCR began the transfer of the Central African Republic refugees farther inland from the temporary settlement in Zongo, in accordance with the 1951 and the 1969 refugee conventions. As of mid-February 2002, nearly 3,000 refugees were transferred to the Mole refugee settlement, some 45 km south of Zongo. Shelters, latrines, shallow wells and a primary school were erected. Over the past months, several thousand refugees have returned to the Central African Republic, leaving an estimated 2,000 refugees within the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

19. Heavy fighting in the Pool region of the southern part of the Republic of the Congo, some 200 km from Brazzaville, continued to cause movements into the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the Luozi area, where UNHCR established a reception centre in 1999, some 606 refugees and 1,236 internally displaced persons have been registered. After negotiations by the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator with the Government of the Republic of the Congo, humanitarian corridors were opened for the provision of supplies, food and medical kits to the displaced persons in the Pool region.

Republic of the Congo

20. As of the end of 2001, the Republic of the Congo was host to 119,150 refugees mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola and

Rwanda, of whom UNHCR assisted some 104,700. The presence of former combatants among the Rwandan refugees, mainly in the Loukala region in the northern part of the Republic of the Congo, has been a subject of continuing, grave concern and discussions are under way with the Congolese Government.

Burundian refugees

21. Despite the insecurity in some provinces, encouraging developments were observed following the inauguration of Burundi's transitional Government on 1 November 2001. Meetings held in January 2002 opened a window of opportunity for the repatriation of the 541,000 Burundian refugees in the neighbouring countries. Return to the southern provinces is not, however, being encouraged or promoted at the moment, owing to the security concerns in these provinces. To facilitate voluntary repatriation to the north-western provinces and to prepare for reintegration, sensitization campaigns were conducted both in the United Republic of Tanzania and on the receiving side in Burundi. "Go and see" visits by refugees to home areas were also carried out. Moreover, UNHCR initiated training activities in judicial and protection issues in anticipation of large-scale repatriation movements. The total number of Burundian returnees from the United Republic of Tanzania since the facilitated repatriation operation began in March 2002 stood at 10,900 persons as of 28 May 2002.

Rwanda

22. Ongoing reconciliation efforts in Rwanda, including measures to bring suspected cases of genocide to justice, should encourage the return of more Rwanda refugees. Similarly, "Imagine Coexistence" activities have continued to be carried out in an effort to promote reconciliation among the returnees and local communities. A workshop held in April 2002 on "Rethinking Peace, Coexistence and Human Security in the Great Lakes" was organized by UNHCR, the National University of Rwanda, the University of Maryland and the Commission on Human Security. Its aim was to bring together coexistence and conflict management practitioners and researchers to explore approaches and paths to peace in the Great Lakes region from a human security perspective.

D. Southern Africa

23. At the end of 2001, the countries of southern Africa hosted 602,300 persons of concern to UNHCR, of whom 365,400 were refugees, mainly from Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Hopes for peace and stability in this subregion strengthened as the civil war in Angola came to an end. However, critical food shortages affecting some parts of southern Africa as well as political tension have given rise to persisting anxiety.

Angolan refugees

24. The ceasefire agreement of 4 April 2002 included a pledge for both parties to pursue the collapsed 1994 Lusaka peace accords. While some 10,000 Angolans repatriated spontaneously from Zambia to Moxico Province in eastern Angola, UNHCR began preparations for a large-scale programme to assist spontaneous returnees and prepare a framework that would guide the voluntary repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of Angolan refugees. The inter-agency assessment team that travelled to Angola, of which UNHCR was a part, estimated that up to 80,000 refugees could return by the end of 2002. United Nations assessment missions took place in June 2002 in order to launch a joint emergency humanitarian appeal with the Government of Angola.

Zambia

25. The Government of Zambia, well known for its open-door policies towards refugees, has initiated, with the support of UNHCR and the United Nations Office for Project Services, a national development plan closely linked to refugee relief programmes. The Zambia Initiative, initially targeting the Western Province for the implementation of the pilot project, will run for two years from June 2002. As the Initiative is drawn up within the overall national development plans of Zambia, assisting both refugees and local communities, it marks the first step towards bridging the gap between relief and development and will expand the capacity of refugees to become agents of development in their host communities.

26. As at the end of 2001, Zambia was host to 218,150 Angolan refugees, the largest refugee population in the country.

Namibian refugees

27. Under a revised Tripartite Agreement between the Governments of Botswana and Namibia and UNHCR, plans are under way for the return of some 2,400 Namibian refugees wishing to return from the Dukwi refugee settlements in Botswana. However, the situation in the main return area in the Caprivi Strip remains unpredictable. UNHCR will continue to monitor the situation and will facilitate the return of refugees who wish to go back. Many of the refugees have been in the Dukwi refugee settlements since 1998, when they fled secessionist violence.

III. Specific areas of inter-agency cooperation

A. Coordination of resources

28. The Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) is the single most significant mechanism for humanitarian resource mobilization and the most important coordination and strategic planning tool for country or regional operations for United Nations agencies, the International Movement of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Governments. For 2002, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has launched CAPs for 13 African countries and regions, proposing programmes for a total of US$ 1,266,229,498. By mid-year, $321,725,380 was made available, or 25.4 per cent of the total amount requested. This underfunding has mainly affected children and women. When sudden high profile emergencies occur, such as in Afghanistan and Kosovo, the overall level of humanitarian funding for all emergencies does not increase, leading to the phenomenon of "forgotten emergencies", particularly in Africa. An increasing proportion of humanitarian assistance is now channelled through NGOs and government aid bodies, leaving only some 30 per cent of all humanitarian aid being channelled through the CAP. As a result, the coordination of resources can only properly be achieved with the establishment of a global humanitarian financial tracking system that records and analyses all flows of humanitarian assistance.

B. Security of refugee settlements and staff safety

Security of refugee settlements

29. Camps that become militarized pose a threat to the lives of inhabitants and the surrounding population owing to cross-border rebel attacks, renewed fighting and rising tensions. Militarized camps also encourage extortionate behaviour, of which refugees may fall victims. In the absence of security arrangements in the camps, or when necessary means are not in place, UNHCR is called upon to provide training and technical and logistical support. Cooperation with MONUC for the separation and transfer of former combatants took place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. From the outset of emergency situations, moreover, UNHCR continues to relocate refugees farther inland from border areas in accordance with international refugee law. During the reporting period, mass relocation operations were carried out in Angola, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Liberia and Zambia.

30. UNHCR has also stepped up its security measures in the camps by putting in place refugee security guards to patrol camps. In Guinea, camp security arrangements have been carried out in conjunction with the Government of Guinea. In the United Republic of Tanzania, the security package in refugee camps continues to be implemented. Furthermore, UNHCR lent support to a joint military exercise with the French Government — "Tanzanite RECAMP" — aimed at reinforcing African capacities to participate effectively in peacekeeping missions and humanitarian relief operations. In South Africa, border police training projects were held in partnership with NGOs and the South African Police Service.

Staff safety

31. As over 80 per cent of UNHCR operations take place in countries where there is a United Nations security phase, humanitarian workers often face high security risks. During 2001, a total of 148 security incidents took place, of which 71 were serious, and five staff members were evacuated from duty stations for security reasons. The creation of posts for additional field safety advisers and assistants, staff welfare, medical services and telecommunications officers, and a central pool of security advisers has

served to strengthen capacity for deployment of staff to operations wherever there are urgent needs.

C. Assistance to and protection of refugee women and refugee children

Refugee women

32. Mainstreaming gender in all aspects and at all levels of assistance and protection to refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons has been a priority for UNHCR, combining its efforts with those of other United Nations agencies and NGOs. As follow-up to the refugee women's consultations held in June 2001, UNHCR announced in December 2001 its commitment to several activities designed specifically to empower refugee women as part of its solutions-oriented approach to refugee protection.

33. Various initiatives have followed the landmark adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. In the Mano River countries, namely Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, in January 2002, UNIFEM commissioned an independent expert assessment of the impact of armed conflict on women and of women's role in peace-building. Despite the devastating effect of conflict on women in the Mano River countries, the outstanding leadership and courage in mobilizing support networks for peace, justice and reconciliation demonstrated by women, including refugee women, were recognized.

Refugee children

34. Inter-agency cooperation has sought to focus on the following key issues with regard to refugee children: separation; sexual exploitation, abuse and violence; military recruitment; the specific needs of adolescents; HIV/AIDS; and education. Regionally specific issues have included birth registration, child labour and harmful traditional practices, including female genital mutilation and early marriages. The interests of refugee children affected by conflicts also figured prominently in the special session of the General Assembly on children, held in New York in May 2002.

35. Together with UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and specialized NGOs, such as the International Save the Children Alliance, UNHCR has helped to strengthen the tracing and reunification of separated children in Africa, notably in the Great Lakes and the Mano River regions, by improving the coordination and accuracy of databases and by using "photo-tracing albums" and radio broadcasts. UNHCR, UNICEF, ICRC, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the International Save the Children Alliance and World Vision International have worked to produce Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, strengthening the 1997 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in Dealing with Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum.

36. UNHCR also continued to join efforts in advocating against the use of child soldiers in all circumstances. Moreover, UNHCR, in coordination with UNICEF and other partners, has implemented various activities to rehabilitate and reintegrate former child soldiers into their communities, as in Sierra Leone, or to prevent the recruitment of children into armed groups, as in the United Republic of Tanzania. Programmes in several countries have shown that family reunification is key to rehabilitating child soldiers. In Sierra Leone, UNHCR has a sub-agreement with a local NGO which provides foster care and other forms of alternative care for returnee children, including ex-combatants, pending tracing and family reunification, as well as for those children who are unable to unite with their families or community. In the Sudan, UNICEF achieved the demobilization of over 3,500 child soldiers in 2001.

37. Recent allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children by humanitarian workers and peacekeepers in West Africa have highlighted the vulnerability of refugees, internally displaced persons and others, especially women and girls. As a result, UNHCR has implemented a comprehensive programme to combat sexual exploitation in Africa and in its operations worldwide. At the field level, staffing has been enhanced by the deployment of experienced protection and community services officers through UNHCR emergency teams, UNICEF and the IRC Surge Protection Project. Country plans of action have been developed in each Mano River country in close consultation with partners, refugees and local authorities, and awareness-raising activities and training on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and human rights have been widely conducted for field workers. Refugee women committees and SGBV centres have been established and information

pamphlets on SGBV published in the main refugee languages. Furthermore, standards of accountability, information-management and complaints-reporting mechanisms have been put in place. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises was established in March 2002, with a mandate to recommend measures that specifically aim to eliminate the misuse of humanitarian assistance for sexual purposes.

D. Education

38. Education is not only a fundamental human right, but also an important protection tool which must be available throughout the displacement cycle. A 2001 survey of refugees in schools indicates that, of the 20 largest UNHCR education programmes, 13 were located in Africa. The largest number of refugee students was enrolled in Uganda at various educational levels (72,800, or 13 per cent of all students covered by the survey), followed by Kenya (53,000, or 9 per cent) and Algeria (45,000, or 8 per cent). The enrolment of girls in primary education in the 10 main African programmes (43 per cent) is above the global average (39 per cent).

39. Creative and flexible approaches to delivering basic education have been sought in order to reach the maximum number of children, youth and adults, such as the UNHCR standby arrangements with an NGO for the deployment of education officers to refugee operations around the world for up to six months.

40. Inter-agency cooperation is a key element of the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, launched by the Secretary-General in April 2000, which seeks to promote girls' education. Through a regional evaluation of girls' education, UNHCR has identified good practices in Uganda, where adolescent reproductive health issues and non-formal education through peer education have proven successful as a means of overcoming low enrolment rates, particularly at the higher grades.

41. The UNHCR Refugee Education Trust, an independent fund for refugee post-primary education that became operational in May 2001, has supported more than 18,000 refugee children in Guinea, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, to attend secondary schools, in the hope that they may return to their communities as teachers, professionals and leaders. Similarly, a higher learning institution in South Africa has inaugurated the African Refugee Scholarship Programme under the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Education. Together with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Telecommunication Union, UNHCR has established multi-purpose community telecentres in the United Republic of Tanzania run by refugee women. The UNHCR Peace Education Programme, aimed at developing skills and attitudes for peaceful and constructive behaviour, is now being implemented in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia and Uganda. Preliminary training and workshops were conducted in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and the United Republic of Tanzania as a pre-requisite for full implementation in 2002. An evaluation of the programme in Kenya began in December 2001 and was completed in March 2002.

E. HIV/AIDS

42. A Strategic Plan 2002-2004, "HIV/AIDS and Refugees", developed by UNHCR in collaboration with UNAIDS, has outlined objectives and strategies for technical support and operations, many of which are to be implemented in Africa. A policy note on HIV/AIDS among refugee communities in Africa was also issued, followed by a note on "next steps" with action points which can be immediately undertaken. To create a stronger field network and identify the coverage and impact of activities on the ground, self-assessment and monitoring forms were developed in close collaboration with partners that include national AIDS control programmes and NGOs. Similarly, to strengthen leadership and partnerships on HIV/AIDS as a security issue and to meet the objectives set out for responding to the disease in emergency situations, a two-year strategic work plan, "HIV/AIDS and Security", has been developed by UNAIDS. The plan will focus on international and national security as well as community security, covering vulnerable populations affected by conflict, including refugees and returnees, particularly women and children.

43. With the support of funds received from the United Nations Foundation, UNHCR has established multisectoral prevention and response initiatives during the past three years, addressing the reproductive health

needs of young people with a particular focus on HIV/AIDS. Activities have been carried out in a large number of countries and have focused on the prevention and care of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons, including host communities, war-affected women and children, and peacekeeping and security forces.

F. Environmental management

44. A series of community-based environmental demonstration projects continued to be supported and promoted by UNHCR in and around refugee camps and settlements. Lessons from these experiences now enable successful practices to be replicated elsewhere.

45. Environmental education, geared particularly to children, continues to receive more focus given its role in awareness-raising. In collaboration with UNESCO, UNHCR is supporting a range of environmental education programmes, which include the integration of environmental components into existing school curricula, the training of teachers and the development of educational materials. For example, agricultural projects undertaken in Guinea, Rwanda, the Sudan and Zimbabwe have improved the livelihoods of refugees, while at the same time reducing their impact on the surrounding environment.

G. Linking relief, reconstruction and development

46. Humanitarian organizations and development agencies have shared responsibility in building peace and promoting development. The gap between emergency relief assistance and sustainable development can be bridged if there is a concerted effort among the different actors. The concept of the "Four Rs" — repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction — recently developed by UNHCR, is key to avoiding the recurrence of conflicts.

47. Various activities have been carried out with development agencies. For example, in Eritrea, where mass repatriation operations are taking place mainly from the Sudan, UNDP and UNHCR developed a joint strategy endorsed by the Government and the United Nations country team for the reintegration of returning refugees within the overall scheme of Eritrea recovery. Similar initiatives are being carried out in Sierra Leone. In Burundi, the World Bank Post-Conflict Fund and the European Union have generously funded reintegration activities in the areas of return. UNHCR has also focused on increased access to microfinance for communities affected by conflict to help them rebuild their lives, become self-reliant and reintegrate in their communities of origin. A database on microfinance and UNHCR-funded income-generating activities was developed in 2000 in close collaboration with the International Labour Organization, and microfinance projects benefiting from that organization's technical expertise were carried out in Rwanda, Somalia and Uganda.

48. For the rehabilitation and reconstruction of war-torn countries or refugee-impacted areas, the post-conflict rehabilitation projects launched in Rwanda in September 2001 continued to be implemented under the "Brookings process". Bilateral partnership with bilateral donors has also proved effective in promoting the seamless transfer from emergency assistance to reconstruction. UNHCR also reinvigorated its cooperation with the African Development Bank and entered into partnership with the Japan International Cooperation Agency in an effort to alleviate the social and economic impact of mass refugee populations and to ensure sustainable development following voluntary repatriation.

49. When an immediate solution cannot be foreseen, UNHCR has been promoting self-reliance among the long-term refugee population, building skills and empowering refugees, together with the local community, to become "agents of development". The Uganda Self-Reliance Strategy, which began in 1999, has been continuing with the cooperation of the Government of Uganda for the benefit of Sudanese refugees. A National Health Sector Strategic Plan was formulated in 2001, benefiting both the refugees and the immediate host communities. Similar measures are now foreseen in the education sector. Under the Zambia Initiative, the Government of Zambia wishes to build on positive aspects of the refugees, by including them in its attempt to alleviate poverty in the refugee-hosting areas. These measures are in line with the call to include refugees in a broader development context and to tap their development potential, rather than viewing them as burdens to society.

50. UNHCR is also calling for Development through Local Integration (DLI) programmes such as these to be incorporated in the national development plans, thus

including refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in poverty-alleviation initiatives within the coordination framework of the United Nations. Smooth coordination among humanitarian and development actors needs to be in place, with budget lines established specifically for communities in transition. There is also a need to include refugees, returnees and receiving communities in the Common Country Assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework process, resulting in an integrated approach by the United Nations country teams in support of government development plans.

H. Internally displaced persons in Africa

51. Those persons displaced within borders are today estimated to number over 50 million worldwide (of whom 25 to 30 million have fled their homes because of conflict), far exceeding the global refugee population (12 million). Some 50 per cent of persons internally displaced because of conflict are in Africa. As of the end of 2001, the number of internally displaced persons of concern to, and assisted by, UNHCR stood at just over 5 million. Although many internally displaced persons find themselves in situations similar to those faced by refugees, they rarely benefit from comparable levels of protection and assistance. The Senior Inter-Agency Network on Internal Displacement, created in September 2000, has organized assessment missions in Angola, Burundi, Eritrea and Ethiopia. In September 2001, UNHCR issued operational guidelines for its involvement with internally displaced persons, outlining operational and policy considerations and coordination mechanisms within the inter-agency framework.

52. On the recommendation of the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, an inter-agency Internal Displacement Unit became fully functional in January 2002, providing additional expertise to deal with the challenge of internal displacement worldwide.

IV. Cooperation with regional bodies and initiatives

A. Organization of African Unity (OAU) — African Union

53. Issues relating to refugees in Africa have continued to be given high priority on the agenda of OAU (now the African Union), in accordance with the Comprehensive Implementation Plan, the protection framework for Africa adopted at a joint OAU/UNHCR meeting in Conakry in March 2000. Specific aspects of this cooperation have ranged from information-sharing with a view to conflict prevention, logistical and technical support in the context of joint missions, as well as the formulation of a draft protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union.

54. Under the African Union framework, UNHCR is also involved in the discussions on the New Partnership for Africa's Development. UNHCR has been advocating the inclusion of the refugee/returnee dimension in NEPAD with a particular focus on post-conflict recovery activities.

B. African Development Bank

55. Joint operations of benefit to refugees and returnees have mainly included the reintegration programme in Eritrea, where preparations are under way to receive an expected 160,000 returnees in 2002. The support of the African Development Bank will help to facilitate the smooth transition from reintegration to sustainable development and to assist in mitigating the huge impact on the receiving communities. This will largely reduce the instabilities of the initial phase of reintegration and reduce risks of new conflict. The joint programme comprises emergency reconstruction as well as measures to promote demobilization and reintegration through development assistance in areas of return. Similar joint activities are foreseen in the Mano River Basin countries and in Zambia.

C. Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

56. Since 1996, UNHCR, UNDP and IGAD have been collaborating on the rehabilitation of infrastructure and promotion of reintegration activities around the refugee camps in eastern Ethiopia, under a programme designed to bring long-term solutions for refugees in the subregion and to strengthen the region's capacity to prevent and manage humanitarian crises. However, during the reporting period, owing to funding constraints combined with the complexity of the problems in the IGAD region, the realization of proposed projects under this programme has been limited.

D. Economic Community of West African States

57. Coordination measures undertaken by UNHCR and ECOWAS to provide protection and assistance to refugees within the current political and security situation in western Africa have included the signing of a memorandum of understanding in November 2001. The main focus of this cooperation is the Mano River Basin, where needs are most acute.

E. Southern African Development Community

58. UNHCR works in close collaboration with SADC on issues relating to refugee movements; mechanisms for managing and addressing root causes of forced population movements; conflict resolution; preventive diplomacy; and peacemaking. In 2001, UNHCR held consultations with all SADC member States to discuss the refugee situation and operations in the region and raise awareness on refugee issues during SADC ministerial and parliamentarian meetings, in conformity with the provisions of the memorandum of understanding signed by SADC and UNHCR in 1996.

V. Conclusion

59. **The situation of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in Africa continues to pose considerable challenges to the United Nations and the international community as a whole. While there has been a slight decline in the number of refugees and asylum-seekers as a result of ongoing peace efforts and the possibility of voluntary repatriation to some countries, elsewhere, protracted and renewed conflicts have constituted major setbacks to the effective implementation of durable solutions. With the advent of the African Union, it is the sincere hope of the Secretary-General that conflicts which disfigure Africa and which discourage investors will be resolved, enabling thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons to go home and live peaceful lives. The governance of refugee problems in Africa requires a multidimensional approach, involving not only humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR, but also Governments, donors, civil society and the international community at large. Together, all these partners must support the processes of conflict resolution and the establishment of durable peace, which are two essential conditions for the solution of refugee problems in Africa.**